District Review Report

School District No. 62 (Sooke)

April 25 - 28, 2004

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair

Gordon Milne, Superintendent, School District No. 91 (Nechako Lakes)

District Review Report

2003/2004

District Name:	Sooke
District Number:	62
Superintendent:	Dave Drummond
Date of Visit:	April 25-28, 2004
Team Chair:	Gordon Milne, Superintendent, SD 91 (Nechako Lakes)
Team Members:	Jennifer Anderson, Principal, SD 45 (West Vancouver) Trudean Andrews, Vice Principal, SD 20 (Kootenay-Columbia) Don Fairbairn, District Principal, SD 47 (Powell River) Libby Hart, District Principal, Aboriginal Education, SD 91 (Nechako Lakes) Claudia Roch, Director, Standards, Ministry of Education Laurey Roodenburg, Parent, SD 28 (Quesnel) Barbara Smith, Spec. Ed. Resource Teacher/ School Counsellor, SD 70 (Alberni)

Context

School District No. 62 (Sooke), serving approximately 8,700 students, is located in southern Vancouver Island. Communities of the School District include Sooke, Port Renfrew, Metchosin, Langford, Colwood and the Highlands. Although projected to experience a decline in enrolment of approximately 100 students, an actual increase of 64 students occurred during the current school year.

Twenty-five percent of residences are rural. Average income and the percentage of adults with secondary and post-secondary education are comparable to those of the province. The percentages of single parent families in the District's two main catchment areas range from close to the provincial average to double the provincial average.

The percentage of low incidence/high incidence Special Needs students ranges from 30 percent to 100 percent more than that of the province, and the percentages of Aboriginal and English as a Second Language students are lower than those of the province.

The District's educators and support staff are highly experienced. The District's graduates pursue post-secondary education locally and throughout North America.

The District has 19 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 2 secondary schools, 2 alternate schools and a continuing education center that accommodates adults and secondary students. School sizes range from 17 to 1540 students. The District closed one elementary school last year in one zone but will be opening a new elementary school in the next school year in a different zone.

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Although the District's communities are expected to experience considerable population growth in the near future, student population growth is expected to be slow but steady.

Summary of Process

The purposes of the District review are to:

- Review school district and school achievement data.
- Review the School District performance plans (accountability contracts) and school plans to improve student achievement.
- Determine the capacity of the School District to support schools in improving student achievement.
- Make recommendations to the School District and to the Minister about improving student achievement.
- Identify promising practices that might assist other school districts and schools in their plans to improve student achievement.

The Review Team was welcomed at an informal dinner meeting with representatives of the Board of School Trustees, including the Chairperson, Superintendent of Schools, Directors of Instruction, Vice-Principal of Aboriginal Education, President of the District Parent Advisory Council (SPEAC) and a Parent Advisory Council President, President of the Sooke Teachers' Association, President of the C.U.P.E. local, representatives of the District's Writing, Reading, Numeracy and Transitions Working Teams.

The formal review began with a presentation by District staff, providing information about the District, an overview of the School District accountability contract and an orientation to the work of the District's teams that have been configured to address the District goals of writing, reading, numeracy and transitions "Vertical" working teams.

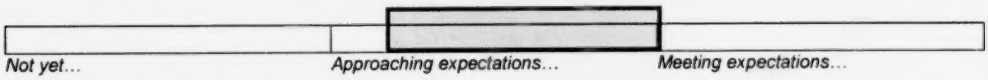
Subsequently, visits were made to 16 of the District's schools where meetings took place with School Planning Councils and other school representatives (including students in some instances). Schools visited included: Colwood, David Cameron, Ecole Poirier, Glen Lake, Happy Valley, John Muir, Lakewood, Millstream, Port Renfrew, Ruth King, Sangster and Sooke Elementary schools; Spencer Middle School; Edward Milne Community School; Belmont Secondary school and West Shore Learning Centre. Members of the District Review Team also met with representatives of the District Parent Advisory Council (SPEAC).

At the conclusion of the review, the District Review Team provided a debriefing to the District and partner groups.

The District Team appreciated the warm welcome and hospitality extended to the Review Team throughout the Sooke School District, the careful and detailed preparation for the Team's visit and the interest shown in the Review process.

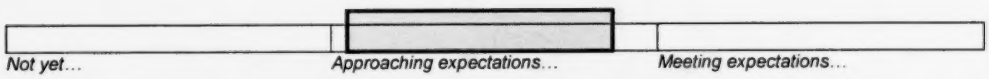
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*
   Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



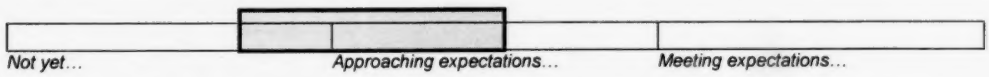
   - The District has established four broad goals that support student achievement.
   - Most schools have selected one or two goals that are aligned to the District goals.
   - Some of the school goals are not clearly related to student achievement.
   - Some schools are in the beginning stages of setting their goals based on evidence.

2. *Rationale:*
   Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, based on evidence, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



   - Each District goal is based on a clear rationale.
   - Many schools have a rationale for each of their goals but the connection is not always clear or direct.
   - The District and schools place considerable reliance on Ministry data as the primary source of data to determine goals and measure results.
   - The District and schools have not yet consistently recognized specific subgroups as part of their rationale.

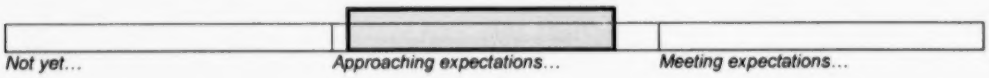
3. *Data:*
   Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the District goals and is used to monitor progress.



   - The District and schools are using Foundation Skills Assessment and other Ministry data as their primary source of data.
   - The District and schools are at the beginning stage of developing district, school and classroom assessments.
   - Performance Standards are being used by a few schools to evaluate student performance and plan for instruction.
   - The District and schools are at the beginning stages of examining trends over time to determine areas of need, plan for improvement and monitor progress.

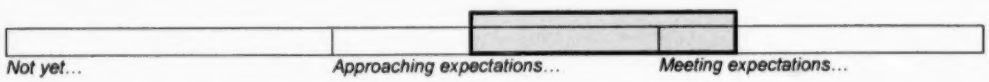
- The District does not yet have a plan to systematically assess students' readiness and on-going progress in order to initiate appropriate interventions in the early primary years (K-3).
- The District and most schools are disaggregating data based on gender.
- Schools are not yet consistently disaggregating data for Aboriginal students.

4. *Strategies:*
Improving districts and schools have well-organized, focused improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



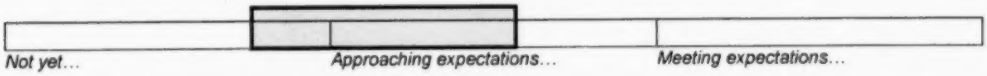
- At the District level staff development is provided to support the implementation of new strategies connected to goals.
- The District and schools are using a wide variety of strategies to support their goals.
- Schools are not yet consistently selecting strategies that align with desired outcomes.
- Schools are not yet consistently monitoring the effects of their interventions to determine which approaches are yielding desired results.
- Current research to inform and implement best practices is not yet being used consistently at the District and school levels.
- Vertical Working Teams are in the process of beginning to explore practical, research-based strategies to support goals.

5. *Structures:*
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organizations – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



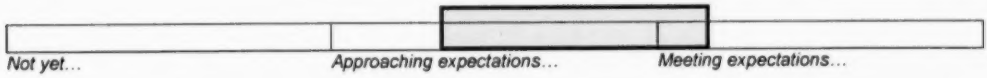
- The District has an Accountability Steering Committee and four Vertical Working Teams to support implementation of each of the District's four goals.
- The District has established an Education Committee of the Whole, dedicating one meeting each month to student achievement.
- A few key programs have been established in partnership with local First Nations and others (e.g. post-secondary institutions, Ministry of Children and Family Development, neighbouring school districts).
- The District and several schools have put some structures in place to support student achievement in areas of greatest need.

6. *Results:*
Improving districts and schools get improved results – at the classroom, school and District levels.



- The District and schools are at the beginning stages of consistentl y establishing baseline data and analyzing trends to set targets, m onitor results and make adjustments accordingly.

7. *Communication:*
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous di alogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being m ade in specific areas of focus.

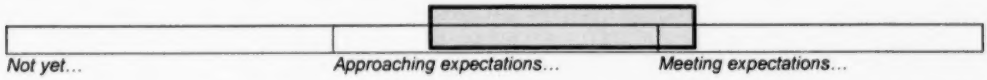


- The District provides opportunities for the public to engage i n focused discussions about student achievement at the monthly Education Committee of the Whole.
- Some opportunities exi st to promote two-way co mmunication between the District and other stakeholders.
- School staffs are actively engaged in focus ed conversation about stude nt learning.
- Some schools have developed inno vative ways to communicate with the public.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence*:
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy f or connecting school and District goals. School uniqueness and school-distric t directions are both valued.

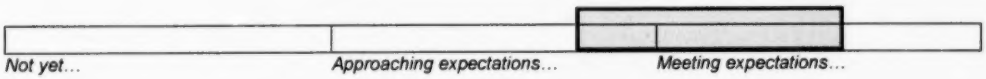
- There is alignment between District and school goals.
- There is evidence of collaborative team planning in some schools.
- Staff and parents value the opportunity to network with colleagues in other schools.
- Considerable reliance is placed on the Vertic al Working Teams to promote collaborative practice and coherence between the Di strict and schools.

9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement*:
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- All schools have parent representation on School Planning Councils and parents have played an active role in establishing the school goals.
- Schools in the District benefit from the support and involvement of core groups of parents in their schools.
- The District and schools are at the beginning stages of engaging less active parents.
- The District and schools are not yet successfully engaging Aboriginal parents.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork:*
Leaders in improving districts and schools have a clear vision for, and commitment, to improving achievement for all students. Leadership at all levels, in all roles, is encouraged and systematically developed in a collaborative learning community with a focus on improving student achievement.



- A commitment to improving student achievement is evident throughout the School District.
- District staff responsibilities have been reconfigured to support student achievement.
- Teachers, vice-principals, principals and District staff are members of Vertical Working Teams.
- Shared leadership is practiced in many schools and at the district level.
- There is evidence at many schools that students are being encouraged to assume leadership roles.

Strengths

- Strong District commitment to enhancing student achievement.
- Energy and enthusiasm for improvement.
- Reconfiguration of responsibilities assigned to senior District staff to support student achievement.
- Demonstrated shared leadership focused on student achievement.
- Teachers are dedicated to supporting and improving student achievement.
- Committed parent leadership on School Planning Councils.
- Professional Development opportunities are aligned with goals.

Promising Practices

- Vertical Working Teams to support each of the District's four goals.
- Monthly meetings of the Education Committee of the Whole, at school sites, focused on student achievement.
- Camosun College - Quad District Partnership program to promote successful transitions to post-secondary.
- Westshore Centre for Learning and Training First Nations Graduation Program.
- District Book Clubs for teachers, to facilitate professional development and collaboration specific to the District's four goals.
- Principals and Vice-Principals Associations' Leadership Development Series.
- Pre-school partnerships with First Nations.
- "Starworks" - a program at Belmont Secondary specializing in academic flexibility.
- "Career News" - a parent produced newsletter.

Recommendations

Team recommendations for strengthening school and District focus on student achievement and for improving results.

The District Review Team respectfully recommends that the District:

- reduce the scope of the Accountability Contract to allow for more strategic and efficient use of resources, both human and material;
- continue to promote assessment literacy throughout the School District, including students and parents in the process;
- further support school plans by coordinating the development of district-wide assessments at all levels and provide greater opportunities for collaboration;
- promote the consistent use of Performance Standards as school-level indicators;
- develop a district-wide plan to support early success for all children with an emphasis on early identification and intervention;
- continue to examine strategies to provide timely information to the public about progress and successes in promoting student achievement;
- develop a plan to increase the success of all students of Aboriginal ancestry; and
- establish a committee involving the local First Nations and off-reserve Aboriginal parents to ensure Aboriginal voice is included in the District's efforts.